Expert Reflection

Disinformation, Democracy, and Conflict Prevention | Essay Series

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November 12, 2020

Disinformation, Democracy, and Conflict Prevention

In this essay series from *Items,* the SSRC's digital forum, researchers assess the state of disinformation across the world and its effects on democratic processes and conflict prevention.

The essays in this series on "Disinformation, Democracy, and Conflict Prevention" are based on presentations at a research workshop on "Disinformation, Democratic Processes, and Conflict

Prevention," convened by the SSRC's <u>Conflict Prevention and Peace Forum (CPPF)</u> and <u>MediaWell disinformation research mapping initiative</u> for the SSRC's <u>Academic Network on Peace, Security, and the United Nations</u>. Scholars and researchers from regions around the world examined the frameworks, findings, and debates in emerging research on information disorder and the linkages between disinformation, elections, hate speech, and identity-based violence. The workshop also explored the ways in which disinformation affects the UN prevention agenda, and how the UN system can better identify, track, and respond to the negative impacts of disinformation where the UN is engaged.

Southeast Asia's Disinformation Crisis: Where the State is the Biggest Bad Actor and Regulation is a Bad Word

By Jonathan Corpus Ong

As Western democracies debate social media regulation, Jonathan Corpus Ong outlines the valuable lessons they can draw from Southeast Asian experiences. Governments in the region have weaponized regulation and hijacked moral panics about disinformation to consolidate control over the digital environment. The challenge facing the world, he argues, is to build a more precise language of responsibility to tackle this multidimensional issue.

Artificial Intelligence and the Cultural Problem of Online Extreme Speech

By Sahana Udupa

A short foray into an AI-based platform's effort to tackle hate speech reveals its promise, but also the enormous inherent challenges of language and context. Debunking the "magic wand" vision of AI moderation, Sahana Udupa calls for a collaborative approach between developers and critical communities.

<u>Classifying and Identifying the Intensity of Hate Speech</u>

By Babak Bahador

Hate speech does not operate in a vacuum, and its rise reflects changing political contexts. If we're serious about fighting hate speech and its violent and destabilizing consequences, we need to identify its earliest manifestations. Babak Bahador offers a hate-speech intensity scale, a strategy that allows us to move beyond the binary approach that dominates current hate speech research. This concept can be operationalized to better identify and understand the evolutions of hate speech before it leads to real-world harms.

The Institutional Crisis at the Root of Our Political Disinformation and Division

By Steven Livingston and Lance Bennett

The roots of the information disorder are multiple, but Steven Livingston and Lance Bennett argue that a disproportionate amount of attention—and critique—have been directed at technology. Although social media platforms rightly share blame for the circulation of mis- and disinformation, the authors suggest that a prior and more consequential source of information disorder may be traced to sustained attacks on "authoritative institutions," which have worked, historically, to foster a sense of shared reality and to mitigate against the threat of disinformation.

Converging Technologies in Africa: Geostrategic Positioning and Multipolar Competition

By Eleonore Pauwels

Recognizing that in the absence of adequate regulations and oversight the most intimate data we share can be used to undermine democratic processes and hurt citizens, Eleonore Pauwels offers suggestions for how UN member states, particularly across Africa, might prevent rising forms of data collection and manipulation that lead to information disorders and electoral disruptions.

Nigeria's Disinformation Landscape

By Idayat Hassan and Jamie Hitchen

The increasing threat to democratic institutions posed by disinformation is a global phenomenon. Yet, as Idayat Hassan and Jamie Hitchen reveal in this case study of Nigeria, the local effects of disinformation are shaped as much by offline conventions and institutions as by online interactions.